

## Essay

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# The Trial of Casey

WASHINGTON

On Nov. 10, 1982, the day Leonid Brezhnev died, as all the sages of Congress and media thumbsuckers were speculating on the Kremlin succession, Director of Central Intelligence William J. Casey sent a C.I.A. assessment to President Reagan.

The last sentence of that memo concluded with the Director's personal judgment: "As for me, I bet Andropov on the nose and Gorbachev across the board."

Horseplayers know that *on the nose* means "to win," and *across the board* is a hedged bet "to win, place and show," or to come in among the first three. Bill Casey's intelligence judgment was sound: the K.G.B.'s Andropov won, and his protégé, the little-known Gorbachev, was placed in the line of succession after the apparatchik Chernenko.

That's the sort of valuable prediction that we pay Directors of Central Intelligence for. Casey was extraordinarily good at that, but you would never know it from the ghoulsh impeachment trial now going on in the guise of Senate confirmation hearings of Robert Gates.

Looming in the background is the contemptible charge that this lifelong

right Casey was. And even when C.I.A. analysts led the dove-cote to misread the Soviet economy, he was on target with his personal assessment of Kremlin economic weakness and inability to cope with our arms spending pressure.

What about the diversion of profits to the Nicaraguan contras from sales of arms for Iran? I have no doubt that Bill Casey personally supervised Ollie North's illegal operation, backdated findings, wrongfully misled Congress and brought deserved shame on his agency and President.

My old friend and I had a severe falling-out about that time, but now I believe this arrogance and degeneration of judgment in his final years had much to do with a tumor destroying his brain.

In the Gates hearings, we are hearing only of the diseased, temperamental Casey, not of the healthy, insightful hard-liner who contributed so much to the victory over Communism. Nobody, not even Senator Warren Rudman, is willing to provide such perspective during the Senate's first posthumous impeachment trial.

Mr. Gates cannot defend his old boss and patron if he wants to be confirmed. On the contrary, he must distance himself from Casey's concluding lawlessness, despite pockets of guilty knowledge all around. The nominee properly admits he should have known more of the illegal diversion, should have told his boss he had a need to know; frankly the likelihood that he would then have blown the whistle is remote.

Let's assume Mr. Gates has an excellent forgettery and was deft enough to stay on the frayed fringe of guilty knowledge. Assume also this frustrated careerist will keep his sworn word to resign rather than obey a Presidential order to pull the wool over Senate oversight — a promise he refused to make last time up. Should he be confirmed?

Yes. He's a cold fish but he knows his stuff about economic intelligence, and if anybody's eyes have been lifted to the necessity of truth in covert action, it's O. Ye Gates. Unlike the bad Casey, he has little political backing to be arrogant about; like the good Casey, he remained vigilant toward the Soviet Union when even his colleagues went starry-eyed.

Casey's impeachment in absentia is not the American way. The time for Senate overseers to kick a man is when he is up and causing trouble, not when he is safely in his grave. □

## Impeachment in absentia.

patriot, while running the 1980 Reagan campaign, conspired with Ayatollah Khomeini to delay the release of American hostages lest credit go to President Carter. That's a late hit by political sore losers.

His widow, Sophia Casey, has shown me documents about his suspicions that Mr. Carter would pull an "October surprise." In a Nov. 2, 1980, memo to Reagan, Casey dismissed a potential Carter ransom effort as likely to be seen as "a desperate last attempt to manipulate the hostages again for political benefit"; Casey's judgment was that "we should say very little and leave it that way."

As C.I.A. chief, did he comprehend the Soviet threat and incipient economic rot? Yes to both: when he reported at the outset that Moscow was behind state-sponsored terrorism, doves clucked indulgently — but now we're getting the evidence of how

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